

This record is a partial extract of the original cable. The full text of the original cable is not available.

UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MANILA 005393

SIPDIS

STATE FOR OES/IHA FOR JKAUFMANN  
STATE FOR INR/EAP FOR JSTROTZ  
STATE PASS USDA/FAS/ICD FOR ROSENBLUM  
STATE PASS USDA/FAS/DL&P FOR MAGINNIS  
STATE PASS USDA/FAS/ITP/AA FOR ALEXANDER  
STATE PASS USDA/FAS/FAA FOR HAGER  
STATE PASS USDA/APHIS/IS FOR HOFFMAN  
STATE PASS USDA/APHIS/VS FOR DUVERNOY  
STATE PASS USDA/ARS/SEPRL FOR SUAREZ  
STATE PASS USAID FOR DCARROLL AND ACLEMENTS  
BANGKOK FOR REO JAMES WALLER  
CIA FOR NATIONAL INTELLIGENCE COUNCIL NIO/EA

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [ECON](#) [PINR](#) [SOCI](#) [EAGR](#) [SENV](#) [TBIO](#) [TSPL](#) [RP](#)

SUBJECT: TEXT MESSAGE RUMORS SHOW RISING PUBLIC CONCERN  
OVER AVIAN FLU

REF A) MANILA 05291 B) MANILA 05059 C) MANILA 04278

[1](#). This is an information message.

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SUMMARY  
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[1](#)2. The Philippines remains free of Highly Pathogenic Avian Influenza (HPAI), but recent text message rumors of HPAI cases in the Philippines show rising public awareness and concern over avian flu. The GRP faces increasing challenges in managing AI information. The Department of Agriculture debunked two recent text messages warning of avian flu cases in Negros Occidental and Cebu. The messages suggest public skepticism over GRP reporting of AI cases. As the GRP expands its public awareness campaigns, such rumors may become more frequent and public information strategies will be increasingly important. End Summary

[1](#)3. The GRP issued strong statements critical of two recent text messages warning of positive avian flu cases in Negros Occidental and Cebu. On November 9, the Department of Agriculture (DA) refuted a text message, initially circulated on November 5, warning of a positive avian flu case in Escalante, Negros Occidental. DA noted that the Bureau of Animal Industry (BAI) conducted random surveillance in October to test poultry for HPAI in the Escalante area, but found no evidence of HPAI. BAI also reported that test results from one dead migratory bird from Escalante indicated that the bird died of natural causes. The Poultry Growers Association of Negros Oriental reported a 40% decline in sales of live poultry on the day after the text message circulated. The group estimated the text messages caused 1.2 million pesos (\$200,000) in losses to the Negros poultry industry. DA previously had refuted a similar text message warning that two migratory birds had died from avian flu in Cogon, Pardo in Cebu. BAI explained that two local birds died from contusions caused by air guns or slingshots.

[1](#)4. In responding to both incidents, the GRP underscored recent initiatives to raise public awareness of avian flu and train regional teams for prevention and preparedness. As reported in ref A, the GRP has intensified these campaigns during the October-February migratory bird season. President Arroyo appointed the head of the GRP mass media group to assist the Avian Flu task force in preparing and implementing its communications strategy.

[1](#)5. COMMENT: We expect rumors of HPAI cases to increase as the GRP and the Philippine media raise public awareness of the avian flu threat. These recent rumors demonstrate the economic damage that AI reports can cause and underscore the interest of the DA and poultry farmers in managing information about suspected AI cases. As reported in ref B, the GRP has a limited surveillance capacity and must rely on poultry farmers and public cooperation to report possible HPAI cases. Although the text message rumors suggest public concern over GRP's ability to handle avian flu, the widespread use of text messaging strongly suggests that it would be unlikely for an HPAI outbreak to go unnoticed.

JONES